Famous Poems of One Poem Men

By BURTON E. STEVENSON, Editor of "The Home Book of Verse"

The Fighting Race

"Read out the names!" and Burke sat back,
And Kelly drooped his head,
While Shea—they call him Scholar Jack—
Went down the list of the dead.
Officers, seamen, gunners, marines,
The crews of the gig and yawl,
The bearded man and the lad in his teens,
Carpenters, coal passers—all.
Then, knocking the ashes from out his pipe,
Said Burke in an offhand way:
"We're all in that dead man's list, by Cripe!
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well, here's to the Maine, and I'm sorry for Spain,"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

"Wherever there's Kellys there's trouble," said Burke.
"Wherever fighting's the game,
Or a spice of danger in grown man's work,"
Said Kelly, "you'll find my name."
"And do we fall short," said Burke, getting mad,
"When it's touch and go for life?"
Said Shea, "It's thirty-odd years, bedad,
Since I charged to drum and fife
Up Marye's Heights, and my old canteen
Stopped a rebel ball on its way.
There were blossoms of blood on our sprigs of green—
Kelly and Burke and Shea—
And the dead didn't brag." "Well, here's to the flag!"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

"I wish 'twas in Ireland, for there's the place,"
Said Burke, "that we'd die by right,
In the cradle of our soldier race,
After one good standup fight.
My grandfather fell on Vinegar Hill,
And fighting was not his trade;
But his rusty pike's in the cabin still,
With Hessian blood on the blade."
"Aye, aye," said Kelly, "the pikes were great
When the word was 'clear the way!'
We were thick on the roll in ninety-eight—
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well, here's to the pike and the sword and the like!"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

And Shea, the scholar, with rising joy,
Said, "We were at Ramillies.
We left our bones at Fontenoy
And up in the Pyrenees.
Before Dunkirk, on Landen's plain,
Cremona, Lille and Ghent,
We're all over Austria, France and Spain,
Wherever they pitched a tent.
We've died for England from Waterloo
To Egypt and Dargai;
And still there's enough for a corps or a crew,
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well, here's to good honest fighting blood!"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

"Oh, the fighting races don't die out,
If they seldom die in bed,
For love is first in their hearts, no doubt,"
Said Burke; then Kelly said:
"When Michael, the Irish Archangel, stands,
The angel with the sword,
And the battle dead from a hundred lands
Are ranged in one big horde,
Our line, that for Gabriel's trumpet waits,
Will stretch three deep that day,
From Jehoshaphat to the Golden Gates—
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well, here's thank God for the race and the sod!"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

JOSEPH I. C. CLARKE.

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HOW many poets there are who have won immortality with a single song! What mysterious impulse moved Joseph Addison to write "The Spacious Firmament on High"? Who knows anything about Louisa Crawford, except that she wrote "Kathleen Mavourneen"? How many decades since would William Douglas have been forgotten except for "Annie Laurie"? What keeps William Shenstone's name alive except his careless lines written at an inn at Henley?

It is not contended here that "The "Fighting Race" will win immortality for its author, Joseph I. C. Clarke, but it is safe to predict that it will live longer than anything else of his and that it will be found in anthologies of Irish and of patriotic poems for many, many years to come. So it seems worth while to set down here, before they are forgotten, the circumstances of its composition, as recently related by him to the present writer.

Joseph Ignatius Constantine Clarke is, of course, an Irishman. He was born at Kingstown, Ireland, in 1846, and came to America at the age of twenty-two. He was in newspaper work for many years, most of the time in an editorial capacity on THE NEW YORK HERALD.

Late on a certain fateful February morning in 1898 he awakened to find his wife standing at his bedside, an open newspaper in her hand, her eyes full of tears.

"They've blown up the battleship Maine in Havana harbor," she said, "and hundreds of our boys are dead."

There it was in a great gasp of horror all over the paper. As Clarke, later on, read the list of dead, the great number of Irish names set him thinking. Irish names of men and places had long been one of his favorite studies. Even then he was searching for a Gaelic name for his cottage at Merriewold Park, and had just decided on "Rossalian," meaning "Beautiful Wood."

Meanwhile, within twenty-four hours the country had gone wild. There was a mad clamor everywhere for war. Bismarck and his Ems dispatch were nowhere. Clarke tried to go on with his work, but the horror of the catastrophe upset him, and he brooded and brooded over the certainty that wherever there was a clash of war there were also Irish names. Irwin had celebrated it in "The Potato Digger's Song":

If the sun never sets on the English flag,
It never goes down on the Irish race.

There was Davis's poem about the "Wild Geese":

On far foreign fields from Dunkirk to Belgrade
Lie the soldiers and chiefs of the Irish Brigade.

There were the MacMahons of France, the O'Donnells of Spain, the Taafes of Austria—"The Fighting Race!"—and suddenly he had the subject for his poem—to begin somehow with the Irish dead of the Maine, and let the rest work itself out. For a full week, during odd moments, he worked at it—writing bits on scraps of paper, old envelopes, anything he happened to find in his pockets, and then stowing them away.

From the first he had a clear vision of the three types of fighting Irishman: blacksmith type, with an apochalyptic Kelly, the rough, huge, heavily muscled, flavor in his speech; Burke, the light, bright, peppery type, a volatile, lyric, lovable, humorous chap, catching the attention of commanders and charming the ladies; Shea, "Scholar Jack," the little, lively, fierce type, a Kerryman, perhaps, exulting in his race and its deeds on the battlefields of the world. And at the end of ten days he got all his scraps together, made them into five stanzas with no little labor, and sent the result to THE NEW YORK SUN.

THE SUN published the poem on its editorial page on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1898. That night there was a dinner of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick at the Waldorf-Astoria, and some of the leading members, who had seen the verses in the paper, asked the author to read them. He did, amid wild acclaim, and Kelly and Burke and Shea took their places in the literary Pantheon of immortal Irishmen beside Father O'Flynn, and Finnigin, and Larry O'Dee, and Paddy O'Rafther, and Father Molloy, and Barney McGee, and all the others whose deeds have been celebrated by the poets.

A Wonder City

By A. M. ACHORN.

"I WAS staying one night at Fickett's farmhouse, at Sprague's Falls of the St. Croix River," said the former reporter, as he was remarking the wonderful change that had come over that wilderness section since his first visit. "It was early autumn. The trees were beginning to decorate the landscape with their colored garments and the house in which I was staying was in the midst of all these glorious colors, but, aside from the continuous roar of the waters as the great river forced itself over the high falls, no other sound broke the stillness.

"Before darkness set in I walked to the falls and sat, lonesome enough, watching that ribbon like flood roll itself toward the sea, and I contemplated the wonders of nature. The great forests on both sides of the river looked the same. Nature recognizes no boundary lines, yet I stood in the forest on the bank of a river that divides the greatest republic on earth from that remnant of the British Empire, the depth and breadth of whose wealth has never yet been dreamed, even by its own native born children. These thoughts filled me as darkness closed down and the moon shone on the scene.

"As I returned to the house with a solemn feeling, I began gazing about the room in an endeavor to find some book or paper to read. All I found were a few school books that must have been used a hundred years before.

"I then turned my attention to an old geography, which gave in its front pages a map of Maine and that portion of New Brunswick which skirts the river, with the old time Indian names of the lakes. The thought occurred to me again, what a wonderful key to power these falls are. 'Why,' thought I, 'this falls could in one day generate sufficient power to build a city here.' With the thought in mind I began to write a story as if of fact, telling of the place being visited by two men from New York, evidently representatives and engineers from some powerful financial concern. They let drop an inkling that they were making surveys of the falls and the surrounding country in preparation of mysterious plans.

"Well, I took the scale of the map in the geography and from it made an estimate of the acreage in the vast watershed. Then, making estimates of annual growth of the trees, worked up a figure of stupendous size. In imagination I built a dam at the falls and a series of dams among the lakes, made a branch railroad from the then constructing Washington County Railroad and the St. John shore line, and, with several big lumber, cotton and paper mills, envelope and paper bag factories, houses, stores and streets added to my plan, my picture was complete and I sent it in to the press as fact. To my great satisfaction and profit my story was in a short time in all the papers, and Sprague's Falls was getting a fair share of advertising. Annual forest growth began to gain momentum.

"Time passes quickly. Twelve years later a man called at my office selling stock in a promotion project, a development of the great water powers of the St. Croix River. His name was Jordan; he came from outside of the State and had read the story of the wonders of Sprague's Falls in his own country weekly. He was impressed with the water power possibilities. He had in his possession all the facts that had been dug out of the old geography in the Fickett chambers of the old farmhouse. He had the figures I had made, just as many ciphers added on to the tail end of the figures as I had on them to make them look well balanced in the story!

"When I told him that it was a delusion, that his prospectus contained only stuff that I had used in a story twelve years before, he said: 'All right, Mr. ———. You think as you like, act as you like, but the bare facts are plain enough to any sane thinking person. The falls are there, the lumber is there, and the annual growth is certain.

"Time went on. To-day the thriving town of Woodland is built with its great paper pulp mill, box and envelope mills, and that part of the dream has come true. I am only a laboring man, yet Jordan is a man of wealth. He made his money in the scheme that built the magic little city at the falls and has served two terms in the Maine Senate. Now the strangest thing of all is that Jordan thinks that it is possible to generate sufficient electricity from these falls to heat and light the country for a radius of fifty miles, and that, with the aid of electricity so generated, sufficient nitrates may be taken from the air to fertilize all the farms in Maine and New Brunswick to a high degree. He purposes to make that power plan come true also."